

**LEISURE SERVICES AND SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (LSSE)**  
Fiscal Year 2004

**Community Service Awards and Volunteers**

Since LSSE's inception, volunteers have strengthened and supported the year-round youth and family programs. During FY 04, students and young adults alike used LSSE as a vehicle to make a volunteer contribution to the Town. Parents often became engaged as well, while looking to assist programs that interested their own children and others. Volunteers who filled the position of youth coach/teacher instructed, guided and encouraged children with an interest in basketball, softball and ultimate frisbee, filling more than 135 coaching positions throughout the year. A total of 24 parents and young adults took the long bus ride up the mountains to Berkshire East Ski Resort and offered a watchful set of eyes to some 245 children and teens sporting skis and snowboards. Special events certainly would not take place at LSSE without the support of volunteers. More than 360 volunteers lent a hand to assist with LSSE's Halloween programs, the Amherst Auction, the Outdoor Challenge Golf Tournament, Amherst Community Theater and the July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration. Programs serving individuals with special needs receive assistance as well. A total of 59 volunteers assisted this past year with the Bolt wood Project and the effort to send the Rainbow Players to the Dundalk International Community Theater Festival.

Considering the fact that volunteers permeate nearly every aspect of LSSE's program offerings, it is easy to understand why the Department believes it is important to recognize these community service efforts with honorary awards. Each year community service awards are presented in a public forum to individuals or organizations that have made significant community service contributions in three areas. These areas are: youth basketball coaching, arts and supplemental education and the quality of life (overall award).

Quality of Life Award – This award was presented at the July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration to the late Earline Robinson for her devotion and tremendous talent in working with youth. For more than a decade Earline donated countless hours of instruction teaching children about dance, drumming and the culture of Africa.

Arts and Supplemental Education Award – This award was presented to Bill and Sally Venman for their inspiration and leadership within the arts community in general and specifically their dedication to founding and building the Valley Light Opera organization. Valley Light Opera has been bringing exceptional productions of Gilbert & Sullivan and other operettas to the Pioneer Valley since 1975.

Youth Basketball Coach of the Year Award – This award was presented to John Hird for his tireless work with youth basketball players. John was literally everywhere, coaching two teams this past year within the Amherst Youth Basketball Program and one team with the Amherst Suburban League.

### **Distinctions, Highlights and Awards**

Bob Brandts, LSSE's Sports and Recreation Director, secured feature writer privileges with the Amherst Bulletin. Bob wrote a column every other week entitled "Up and About," which he used as a way to get the word out to the community about health, fitness and recreation opportunities. In "Up and About," Bob also regularly highlighted the work of area individuals who continued to help make these activities occur and grow.

Linda Chalfant, LSSE Director; and Bob Brandts, Sports and Recreation Director were honored for their knowledge and expertise in the area of youth sports. The Amherst Institute for Training and Development, ITD, asked Linda and Bob to make a presentation to a delegation of Indonesian youth sports enthusiasts/volunteers. The presentation was provided to assist the delegation in implementing youth sports programs in their country. Subsequently, ITD invited Linda or Bob to make a follow-up presentation in FY 05 in Indonesia.

Both LSSE Community Theater Programs were honored with invitations to perform at the Dundalk International Community Theater Festival in Dundalk, Ireland in FY 04. Both groups raised funds to make the trip possible. The Rainbow Players, an inclusive community theater troupe, comprised of performers with and without special needs, is headed by Special Needs Director, Ezzell Floranina. The troupe traveled to Dundalk and performed in a variety of festival venues. The Rainbow Players were supported on this trip in part by a special gift of \$5,000 from Paul Newman. The Amherst Community Theater Program, headed by Arts and Supplemental Education Director Steve Stoia, brought home several individual awards from the festival as well as the award for Best Festival Musical in their performance of "The Secret Garden."

The newly recreated Amherst Community Aquatics Center, ACAC (formerly the Amherst Middle School Pool), opened in September under the direction of Barbara Bilz, Director of Community Programs and Development, and Kristen Johnston, Aquatics Program Coordinator. The opening of this program at the existing pool, with expanded hours and programs and warmer pool temperatures, came about after a concerted public and private effort was made to cover a \$26,000 shortfall by raising funds. The Town, the Schools and private organizations, including the Friends of Amherst Recreation and the Amherst Tritons Swim Team, worked collaboratively to meet the challenge of providing a facility that the community would use and appreciate. ACAC grew to include more than 182 members accounting for 79 memberships with 4,455 paid admissions to the pool. In the previous year, there were 32 memberships and 1,330 paid admissions to the pool.

### **Administration and Facilities**

Of note, under operations, was the strong effort made in FY 04 toward promoting the LSSE brochure to advertisers. Advertising prices were raised and income increased by 58% in FY 04 over FY 03. Laurel Kushi, Operations Manager, and LSSE Registrars, Donna Roy and Pat Desmairis also put a plan in place to attract work study assistance to the office for general support. This was a wise cost-saving and time-management step, given the accompanying increase in registrations over the preceding year. A total of 9,734 registrations were processed in FY 04 compared to 9,211 in FY 03. Accordingly, 654 programs were held compared to 544 in FY 03.

The LSSE website [www.lssse.org](http://www.lssse.org) became an increasingly popular place to register for a program as well as to visit. LSSE averaged 3,300 visits/month compared to 2,700 visits/month the year before. There were also 34,000 hits per month compared to 20,000 in the prior year. In addition,

the website was used heavily by the LSSE sports programs for scheduling, scores and weather-related cancellation information.

Fee reductions saw a jump in FY 04 and provide an early signal to upcoming budget concerns. A total of 707 family members obtained a 66% fee reduction in FY 04, compared to 631 in FY 03. In addition, a total of 77 family members had a 33% fee reduction in FY 04, compared to 62 in FY 03.

There was one staff change in FY 04: Kristin Johnston was hired in September to fill the previously vacant Aquatics Coordinator position. Unlike the position in FY 03, Kristin was hired with the understanding that the operation of the indoor pool must become self-supporting in order to cover the expense of the salary.

Capital improvements in FY 04 focused on two projects: the Plum Brook Athletic Fields and the Amherst Skate Park Study. After numerous months of study and presentation, the Plum Brook Athletic Fields Project made advances through the permitting process and achieved clearance from the Amherst Conservation Commission and the Amherst Planning Board. Some neighbors on Potwine Lane who object to the project sought a different answer to the permit process, however, and filed an appeal with the Department of Environmental Protection. The appeal process began in May and efforts continued to be made throughout the end of FY 04 to seek resolution.

The initiative for the Amherst Skate Park Study occurred in May of 2003, when students from the University of Massachusetts, in collaboration with Amherst youth, brought forward Article 11 before Town Meeting asking for “an action plan of all the elements needed in order to build or dedicate a site for a teen center/skate park complex for the youth of Amherst.” Subsequently, in the fall of 2003, the Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC) and Town Meeting voted the approval of a recommended \$15,000 appropriation for a skate park study. In the spring of 2004 a consultant was hired, the Berkshire Design Group. The study is continuing and, along with other objectives, is exploring possible skate park sites within Amherst.

### **Youth and Adult Sports**

One year after the arrival of LSSE’s new Sports and Recreation Director, the youth and adult sports programs continue to see enormous positive changes. A number of new elements were added to existing programs in order to provide either greater efficiencies or in response to public requests.

In FY 04, the Amherst Youth Basketball program was revamped to include an “Instructional Division” for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade players. While this program had existed in some format earlier, the restructuring eliminated the competition and pressure factor of games and placed the focus on teaching basic skills. A new Girls’ 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade All-Star Game was added at the end of the season, as well as a Coaches vs. Players All-Star game. Both provided a great deal of enjoyment for all participants. For many years, citizens had organized the Boys’ Suburban Basketball Program on a volunteer basis. In FY 04, LSSE was asked to assume the responsibility for the Boys’ Suburban Basketball Program. This action matches the assistance LSSE gives to the Girls’ Suburban Basketball Program. In order to provide a representative voice for the policy-setting aspects of the league and to remove the perception of favoritism/cronyism regarding team selection for the suburban league, a Youth Basketball Advisory Board was put in place. Finally, a new series of coaches’ clinics was added this year to provide more in-depth and hands-on

support to volunteers and to give them the teaching skills and coaching knowledge needed to make them more effective coaches. Local high school and college basketball coaches voluntarily conducted these important clinics.

Youth and adult softball leagues remained popular this year, with 32 teams returning in the adult program – one more team than a year ago. The youth program registered 12 teams across three divisions, or 163 players – just slightly fewer than the 177 in FY 03. The adult softball program finished the season with a celebratory banquet for a second year in a row. Over 200 players visited the Amherst VFW for an evening of food, music, socializing and handing out of end-of-season awards. “Spirit of the Game” awards were made to a player in each division, as voted on by their peers, who best exemplified the spirit of the game through their conduct on the field.

The Summer Ultimate League of Amherst, SULA, continued to grow, with strong participation from youth and adults. A total of 640 players, with 387 youth and 253 adults, convened to total more than 50 additional participants over the preceding year.

Summer 2003 sports camps gained great advances in participation as well. There were 29 different camps in 2003, with 826 participants – an increase from the 756 the year before. New camps introduced included Sunfoot Soccer, Girls’ Lacrosse and Soccer Magic. Tiina Booth’s National Ultimate Camp grew to 106 participants as it relocated to the Hampshire College campus. This camp continues to attract Ultimate enthusiasts from all over the United States.

The adult volleyball league maintained a steady pace of 15 teams, similar to the previous year, and the drop-in programs for both volleyball and basketball continued to attract thousands of adult and youth players over the year

Two new and successful recreation programs added included the Whirlin’ Hurricanes Freestyle Rope Jumping Program and the Fit Over 40 Adventure Club. The Whirlin’ Hurricanes drew 55 participants to the heart-healthy sport of rope jumping. LSSE saw many new faces attracted to this program, which appealed to children who had not previously registered for a sports/recreation program. Parents loved the “Spring Show,” where participants got to show off their skills/routines to friends and family. One participant actually placed second in a regional rope jumping competition held in New Hampshire in June.

The Fit Over 40 Adventure Club made its debut in FY 04 and also attracted and targeted a new group of 27 women participants. Highly complimentary evaluations came back after two seasons of this program, which offered a robust mixture of hiking, biking, walking, running and tennis to adult women motivated to pursue fitness three times per week over a six-week period.

## **Aquatics**

As described earlier, a significant change occurred this past year with the successful and ongoing transformation of the Middle School pool to the Amherst Community Aquatics Center – a facility that the entire community could use. A celebratory Open House was held in February and drew 200 participants, assuredly the highest number of participants to visit the pool since its opening in the 1970’s. Despite these excellent results, more will need to be done to keep this facility vibrant. This past year, the Town assumed the responsibility for the routine and daily maintenance of the pool. The School continued to absorb the responsibility of electrical and

mechanical systems and custodial work. A critical agreement between the Town and Schools for the cooperative use of the facility was developed and continues to be fine-tuned.

The outdoor pools experienced a difficult season in the summer of 2003. The budgetary crisis that preoccupied the state and then overwhelmed the Town meant the elimination of the benefited Aquatics Program Coordinator position and threatened the closing of one of the outdoor pools and a wading pool. A worsening situation grew when the LSSE Aquatics Program Coordinator chose to leave the position earlier than planned, just prior to the busy opening of the pools. This position remained unfilled throughout the summer. The Select Board made the decision to keep the two outdoor pools and the three wading pools open just in time for the summer season of 2003, but left the question open about the future season due to funding uncertainties. Finally, a serious swimming accident occurred at the War Memorial Pool in the summer of 2003 that involved a child attending an LSSE day camp.

### **After School and Vacation Youth Programs**

A total of 968 children attended the LSSE day camps in FY 04, compared to 697 in FY 03. The two vacation camps – winter and spring – saw positive numbers as well, with 96 children registered. The Adventure Playground Day Camp, Early Adventures Day Camps, Prime Time After-School Program and the LSSE Vacation Camps all share many of the same staff, including long-time LSSE employee and Director, Amy Diamond, and numerous other counselors/staff. Parents and staff alike find that the consistency of carrying over/sharing employees from one LSSE child care program to another is a great boon for the children.

The Outdoor Challenge camp continued to offer a successful array of adventure programs, including rock climbing, canoeing, kayaking, caving, outdoor survival skills and leadership training to area teens. This program was directed by James McNaughton from Adventure In Adventure Out and housed on the Hampshire College Campus. In a collaborative effort, Hampshire College provided the housing free of charge for this Amherst teen program. The Amherst Schools contributed enormously to the success of all of the after-school and summer camp programs as well. The location for the day camps, vacation camps and after-school programs and vehicles for bus transportation of children to and from the summer programs is a donation from the Amherst Schools.

### **Performing Arts, Special Events and Supplemental Education Programs**

The “Wizard of Oz” proved to be a popular choice for the Amherst Leisure Services Community Theater (ALSCT) program, with ticket sales soaring to \$50,577 over the previous year high of \$48,083. In addition, underwriting was healthier, with Florence Savings Bank, ComCast and Integrity Development all assisting with sponsorships at \$2,000 each. The cast included a number of talented youth and adults, providing two weekends of stellar performances that packed Bowker Auditorium, with a sale of 4,800 seats. The work of the volunteers, numbering over 100, both behind the scenes and on the crews, continued to be impressive. A drawback and stumbling area for the Theater Program lies with a lack of adequate and consistent space to build the sets for the shows. For the more than 10 years that the program has existed, each year has required a new hunt for set-building space. The lack of available raw building space in Amherst meant that the crews needed to travel to Belchertown in FY 04 to construct the sets. This need also plagues many other local theater troupes. Plans are being envisioned for a space that might serve all in Amherst.

The Massachusetts Cultural Council awarded a \$1,500 grant to LSSE to assist the Open Arms Rainbow Players and ALSCT with productions in FY 04. The Rainbow Players also benefited from a complete dinner sponsorship provided by The Harp in Amherst and numerous individual donations, all intended to help send the Rainbow Players to Ireland for the Dundalk International Community Theater Festival Performance.

The Amherst July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration brought out the crowds for another year of patriotic support in commemoration of the country's independence. A twenty-five minute fireworks display greeted an estimated crowd of 20,000 at the University of Massachusetts fields behind McGuirk Stadium. An Amherst Community Band concert, old-fashioned field and relay games, an Atkins Farm pie eating contest, and refreshment and entertainment vendors all played host to the crowds following many months of preparation for this LSSE-directed program. Many University of Massachusetts departments, including the Physical Plant, Athletics Department, Police Department, Environmental Health and Safety, in addition to the Town of Amherst Fire Department, all worked in a coordinated effort to assist LSSE in making this program take place; they deserve the highest of praise for their contributions. The Northampton Cooperative Bank again sponsored this program at \$4,000.

The Halloween Window-Painting program provided an activity for artistically inclined parents and children. Merchants with store front windows generously gave up their window space for two weeks in October so that 100 budding artists could adorn them with a Halloween theme. A crowd of 200 ghosts, goblins and other Halloween-themed forms paraded through the downtown streets on Halloween night to a performance at the Boltwood parking garage and then to a party at the Bangs Community Center. All of this was coordinated by LSSE Program Director Ezzell Floranina with the volunteer assistance of many Amherst College students.

Hot Summer Nights began in earnest but ended without the cooperation of the weather. All three July shows were unfortunately rained out.

Youth and adult supplemental education courses saw a dip in participation this year, due largely to the dissolution of several partnerships. In FY 04, there were 1,622 students participating in 200 classes, compared to 1,923 participants in 243 classes the year before. After several years of successful partnership, LSSE bid goodbye to the Fiber Arts Center when it seemed ready to operate on its own. In many ways, this amiable separation illustrated an LSSE Arts and Supplemental Education Program objective – to give fledgling arts organizations the support they need in order to eventually gain stability. Hampshire College had listed some courses with LSSE, and the Synthesis Center had also experimented in this way but found fewer program registrants than desired for their efforts.

On the positive side, LSSE Youth and Adult Education classes found success with these programs through the use of several of the schools' specialized classrooms, including: Carpentry for Women using a school woodshop, Photography with use of the High School's dark room, and numerous cooking classes in the Middle School home economics rooms. Additional interest was seen in blacksmithing classes and a revamped driver's education program.

### **Special Needs**

The various program offered to individuals with special needs throughout FY 04 under the auspices of the LSSE Open Arms Program included: a monthly cabaret, the Rainbow Players Community Theater Troupe Program, a monthly newsletter, reduced membership fees to the

Amherst pools and various classes, workshops and outings. Additionally, the Boltwood Project was offered through a partnership with the University of Massachusetts; it provided two semesters of volunteer-led social activities to adults with developmental disabilities. The Town also supplied special needs assistants to those needing a one-on-one assistant, a sign language interpreter, or other types of accommodations, in order to make program participation available. The Special Needs Program Director also offered training and support to all LSSE's programs, with particular emphasis given to the day camps and after-school programs. In FY 04, there were 42 participants with special needs engaged in the LSSE day camps over the seven-week period.

In FY 04, in addition to sending the Rainbow Players to Ireland, two new youth theater winter and spring classes were offered. An Angel Tickets Program was also provided through the support of the University of Massachusetts Fine Arts Center. This program made free arts performances programs available to those with an Open Arms membership.

The LSSE special needs programs, which were offered free, or for a very small user fee, were largely funded by grants, donations and various fundraising efforts. Additional assistance was provided by a combination of work study student and volunteer support. The primary difficulty that occurred in FY 04 was insufficient time to accomplish the necessary tasks for growing programs that are naturally occurring as the public becomes more aware of their existence.

### **Summary**

FY 04 at LSSE was a mixture of achievements, successes, collaborations, challenges and concerns. Requests for LSSE programs and services have continued to grow since its beginnings in 1982. As LSSE's reputation for administering quality programs and services makes steady gains, invitations also grow for LSSE to "umbrella" or fully administer privately supported programs. These invitations are viewed by LSSE as examples of our success; however, they are also a request for more Town services. And this is understandable. Many in our community are consumed with family and work, leaving little time to complete all of life's daily tasks, let alone leisure pursuits. While LSSE has benefited from the support of hundreds of volunteers, our community's ability to sustain volunteer-headed initiatives appears to be diminishing.

Linda Chalfant  
Director